



Councillor Daniel Gottschalk
Portfolio Holder for City Development
Exeter City Council

12 October 2017

Dear Cllr Gottschalk

Exeter Green Party believe that the development of the Greater Exeter Strategic Plan (GESP) is an excellent opportunity to demonstrate the importance of planning to our daily lives. However technical planning may be, it is fundamentally the means through which political choices are made about the sort of places we want to live in. To achieve that, we believe it is essential that the councils involved take innovative steps to engage a wide range of people in the development of the plan.

We made this basic point in our comments on the draft Statement of Community Involvement. It is disappointing that there has been no response by the councils to that consultation, and meanwhile the process of developing the draft plan rolls on as if the draft SCI were the final version.

Against this background, we wish to put the following points to you, both as the lead member on Exeter City Council's Executive and as the ECC representative on the GESP Member Steering Group.

1. The draft SCI envisages a 6-week consultation period. We regard this as wholly inadequate. In addition to the draft plan itself, we understand that the various evidence studies underpinning the plan's proposals will be published at the same time. No doubt developers, housebuilders, transport operators and others with paid staff (or who can pay consultants) will be able to digest and analyse this volume of information in short order. But the idea that community groups, small businesses and individuals can do so is simply unrealistic. By holding to a short consultation period you would in practice ensure that everyone other than a privileged minority is being denied the opportunity to study the evidence and engage with the councils on equal terms. We therefore request that the consultation period be extended to a minimum of 12 weeks.

2. The GESP development process is overseen by a Member Steering Group from the constituent councils which meets in private and does not publish agendas and minutes. We regard this as lamentable, since there is no sensible justification for not being open with the people whose lives will be affected by the proposals. When the initial proposal for a GESP was being considered by City Councillors, there was concern among some councillors that there were insufficient mechanisms for the GESP Member Steering Group to report back to councillors. We would be grateful to know how, and to whom, you report on the proceedings of the GESP Member Steering Group and why such reports are not publicly available.

3. If the councils insist on continuing to meet in private, then we believe there should be opportunities for public engagement in the process other than the formal consultation periods. Too much planning is top down, based on what planners (and, perhaps, councillors) think is good for us. There is not enough listening to people outside the planning community who may not engage with formal consultation exercises, *before* drafts are produced. We request that the councils should prepare a programme of proactive engagement and discussion with communities, particularly community groups, and one which will attract people in greater numbers than the static exhibition at the Guildhall on 16 March. Although it may be too late to start such a programme before the first consultation draft there is plenty of time for one to be implemented between the draft plan and the consultation version in 2019.

Planning should serve communities, not alienate them. We believe that greater openness and willingness to engage by councils will go a significant way to achieving this goal.

We would of course be very willing to discuss in more detail the issues raised in this letter.

I look forward to your response. Because we as a party seek to draw public attention to the GESP process, we are issuing details of this letter to the media.

Yours sincerely,

Cllr Chris Musgrave

Alphington ward (Green Party)