

**To Councillor Peter Edwards
Exeter City Council**



cc
Karime Hassan, Chief Executive
Cllr Bialyk, Portfolio Holder for Health and Wellbeing, Communities and Sport
Cllr Kevin Mitchell, Lead Liberal Democrats
Cllr Andrew Leadbetter, Lead Conservatives

March 22nd 2018

**Open letter from Exeter Green Party
Bus and coach station development site – call for review**

Dear Councillor Edwards,

Many years have passed since the City Council first decided on its current policies and plans for this valuable and rare development site in the centre of our city. Your Development Principles for the site are dated June 2012, for example.

Inevitably, with the passing of time, things happen, and national government, County and City council policies also evolve.

We are writing to you now because we believe that the current and future context in which this development is being considered has altered so fundamentally, that it is now imperative to reconsider the most appropriate and possible uses for this site.

With land values so high, for the Council to own 75% of a valuable, large site in the city centre offers a once in several generations opportunity to improve our city centre, and it is vital to get it right.

Our reasons for asking the City Council to pause and take a fresh look at this whole site are set out here.

Transport to and around the site

Chronic congestion, poor air quality, the need to move people to active travel modes and public transport, plus the uproar over closing Paris Street – which Exeter Green Party supported in principle – all clearly demonstrate that before further development decisions are taken, ECC, working closely with DCC, need to **develop a whole city transport plan** so that any decisions about car movements / road closure relating to this site are then made with reference to this transport plan. This plan will also ensure that air quality improvements are planned into the development and a proper cycle and walking plan to and through the site can be developed.

Bus and coach station issues

We, along with numerous other groups, including Devon County Council as the Highways Authority, **deplore your decision to partially or wholly demolish the current bus station for 'de-risking' works.** There are so many uncertainties associated with when/if a new bus station will be built, let alone with the rest of the site, that the extreme inconvenience that will be caused to the travelling public cannot be justified. Much better to pause the proposed demolition as part of a whole site review.

There are serious concerns, expressed again by a range of groups, that **the proposed bus station is much too small, and indeed not fit for purpose as coaches cannot be accommodated.** Your own internal team said¹, *'The above provision [i.e. what the report proposes] is the absolute minimum for the current service levels. It provides no scope for future expansion of services as Exeter grows, which has potential to result in a poorer bus station experience for the public and/or more bus stops on street.'* There has been and will continue to be significant population growth and commuter growth since that report was written.

Cllr Bialyk told a public meeting² that your administration has never considered refurbishment of existing bus station. This is a serious omission, especially given the financial and economic climate now and into the foreseeable future. **We therefore call on the council to undertake a feasibility study into the option of refurbishing the current bus and coach station,** and to compare the results to the costs and benefits of building a new station and the potential for integration into new plans for the site.

The current usage of the High Street by the city bus network for crew changes is another issue that we believe would merit further examination. Could the bus and coach station be made more use of for crew changes, thus reducing the number of stationary buses in the High Street?

Review swimming provision across the city

Exeter Green Party has to date supported the City Council's plan to create St Sidwell's Point pool and leisure centre. However, we feel that a number of new issues mean that if the City Council is to make the best possible, future-proofed decision, then it needs to revisit the whole issue of pool provision across the city. These issues include:

- The successful Sport England funding of around £100 million is a powerful reason to stop and consider all options relating to swimming provision across the city
- The fact that the Northbrook pool is also near the end of its life should be included in any such review.
- The recent revelations regarding the state of Pyramids pool and the amount of money needed to keep Pyramids it going raise the questions of whether it is possible to or worth either refurbishing Pyramids or building a new pool on that site, releasing more of the valuable central site for mixed use development. We therefore call on you to **investigate**

¹Stage C Concept Design Report, March 2016, page 14.

² Civic Society meeting about the bus station site, 03/02.2018

whether the Pyramids could either be refurbished, and also investigate the possibility of building a pool on the Pyramids site.

- On reflection, we no longer support the idea of including leisure facilities alongside a city centre pool. We see no case or market gap in further gym / exercise class space in the city. There are flourishing small gyms everywhere and people like going to classes in their neighbourhoods, in church halls, schools etc. This would be a more affordable option, convenient for residents, and increase the offer of local services in neighbourhoods, thus also reducing travel. Taking out the leisure facilities would also reduce the cost of any city centre pool.

What needs to be in the new development

We believe that the council should take the opportunity provided by the withdrawal of Crown Estates, to revisit its 2012 Development Principles, so that guidance for what must /could be on the site is informed by the latest knowledge and policy changes.

In particular, we believe that the City Council should make an absolute commitment to providing a **modern, iconic covered multi-use market, with associated open space**. This would be used by not only local food producers and traders, but would also provide space for local organisations who want to have stalls, craft and cultural events. There is a great wish to see a market like this in the city – 70% of residents interviewed by Exeter Green Party supported seeing a modern city centre market.

Research³ carried out by Food Exeter, a multi-agency civil society partnership, and presented to the City Council, underlines the national evidence showing how modern city centre markets increase footfall, and actually increases spending in city centre shops as well. It also revealed that the producers using the current farmers market felt that an improved, bespoke market in the centre was the single thing that would most help their businesses. Markets also provide a space to reflect and celebrate Exeter's cultural diversity. Food Exeter and Exeter Civic Society are both asking the council to include a market space / covered market as part of refreshed design for the site.

The commercial elements of any brief for the site cannot simply rely on national chains of shops or restaurants – we can all see that this model is broken. Instead, to future proof the success of the site, it should **design in space that supports small, micro and pop up businesses**. This will make the local economy stronger and more resilient and critically, help bring people back for a shopping & cultural experience.

Affordable and social housing in the mix will help anchor the city centre with a core of residents who are out and about and have a stake in the space.

Ask residents and organisations for their views

The City Council's stated position that it is open to discuss what should happen to the wider site i.e. the area not covered by the proposed new bus station and St Sidwell's Point. We urge you to

³ <http://foodexeter.org.uk/why-2/explore/>

make good on that suggestion **and carry out a full and open consultation on what should be provided on the site in order to develop a new Master Plan.**

Keep running of new pool in-house

Finally, we urge you to commit to the City Council running any new pool facility directly. The experience of Legacy Leisure's wholly inadequate maintenance and safety regimes, and the bad customer experiences at Pyramids and Riverside demonstrate that privatised suppliers are not doing the job and not offering value for money.

We look forward to receiving your comments on our proposals

yours sincerely

Cllr Chris Musgrave,
Alphington Councillor

&

Diana Moore,
Green Party Candidate, St David's Ward