

Member's discussions at Exeter Central Library, 17 March 2012.
Exeter Bus & Coach Station Redevelopment

The Society held a members discussion about the proposed redevelopment of the bus & coach station redevelopment, and the wider implications for the City.

Bus parking, servicing and wash depot to be relocated elsewhere in the city - where?

Discourage long distance coaches entering the city to reduce the number of large vehicles using the roads to the city centre. This could be achieved by having shuttle buses bringing passengers into the centre, and facilitated by long distance coach operators such as National Express. Buses would need to have good luggage holding areas. Some concern that some people will face more difficult journeys and that some coaches operate at unsociable hours. Some thought that passengers could start their journey at the changeover point rather than the coach station.

Need a well designed and attractive bus station that is covered. Some concern that an enclosed bus station could contain petrol fumes. Need to investigate the best of the rest. Concern how the redevelopment of the area will impact upon local shops and businesses, don't want to see them lost as is thought to have happened with the Princesshay redevelopment. Sidwell Street also functions as a district centre for people of the St James's area. One suggestion was that a form of planning gain could be to offer subsidised rents for local businesses.

No objection to the principle of the redevelopment. Main concerns were that there must be a reasonable balance between commercial benefit and public benefit. The bus station is not a planning gain as it opens up the site for retail development.

Discussion about the provision of a swimming pool on the site. Most agreed a new swimming pool is desirable, but this could be very expensive. Some questioned whether we should expect the development to pay for a swimming pool as there are other benefits that could be delivered. It was suggested that the pool should be provided in another location, which may be more appropriate. Generally agreed that the City council should investigate options for a new swimming pool in the city. It would be desirable to have a 50m pool as other major cities. It is known that the swimming club has not been able to attract events to the city due to the poor quality of the city pool. Spectator seating should be provided, and this could be screened off and used as function rooms when there is no swimming events. The existing swimming pool site could be a good site for a theatre which has been suggested for the bus station site.

Agreed that the Society needs early engagement to the planning process, as we had with Princesshay, to avoid past outcomes such as the Post Office being located on the first floor. The terrain of the site should be maximised, perhaps by excavating material for the pool or underground parking / servicing. Having a range of small retail units for local businesses should be a feature of the development.

Retaining an open air market is desirable, either in the new development or Sidwell Street. This should be made a central feature of the town centre and include the farmers market. Markets elsewhere in the country are a central feature of the city centre. It was thought that this would create an open area that would offer options as a public space.