

City Development,  
Exeter City Council,  
Civic Centre,  
Paris Street,  
Exeter,  
EX1 1NN

19th April 2012

Dear Sir,

The Civic Society Planning Sub-Committee welcomes the opportunity to make a formal response to the City Council's consultation to your Design Principles for the redevelopment of the Bus & Coach Station site. We support the redevelopment of this part of the city centre and hope to make additional comments as proposals are developed in more detail. We attended both of the stakeholder meetings and found them interesting and useful. We would make the following comments:-

Principle A: We note the Principle that the development has to be financially viable.

Principle B: We agree with the new development becoming permeable to Sidwell Street as this is a shopping Street which has established its own character, and that character should be retained as a wide shopping street. It would be good to see Sidwell Street's streetscape improved so that it is similar to that of the new development, in the same way that High Street's streetscape was improved. We are cautious about this area having a separate identity believing the area should complement the Grecian Quarter rather than Princesshay and the High Street. Some of the shops and facilities in Sidwell Street directly support the population of St James, acting as a district centre such as Cowick Street, Heavitree, Pinhoe and Topsham. We urge the Council to ensure that this localism is retained in Sidwell Street.

Principle C: We do not disagree with the development being retail led, but urge caution over seeing the whole development come forward as one whilst there are so many empty shops elsewhere as this could have a detrimental effect on other parts of the city centre. If leisure facilities are to be included in the development we ask that the Council make their proposals known as soon as possible so the public and sports clubs can comment further. We advise against the inclusion of a Hotel and offices as there are empty offices elsewhere in the city centre and several proposals to build hotels elsewhere. We agree with improving public transport use to access the city centre but urge the City and County Councils to bring forward proposals as soon as possible as this does not need to be reliant upon this development.

Principle D: We agree with establishing an urban grain in this area by establishing building blocks, streets and open spaces.

Principle E: It would be good to see all streetscapes having a positive face, including those outward facing to existing streets. We do not agree that the area has to be developed with distinctively different lighting, street furniture, and hard landscaping in a contrived way, but accept that the fashion for these elements changes over time. We believe the buildings should provide the main character for the area and they should provide some cohesiveness to the area. It would be good to see the landscaping of adjoining streets developed to raise their profile.

Principle F: We agree with this Principle. It would be a good to see several access points from Paris Street, as well as active frontages as the lower part of this Street is currently soulless.

Principle G: We agree with this Principle. We would like to see the enhancement of adjoining streets so there will be less of a contrast between new and existing developments. We welcome the development of a square at the junction of Sidwell Street and Paris Street and see this as an opportunity for landscape features and a means of 'greening' the area. As an alternative to a landmark building we would suggest a landmark feature such as a fountain. We question why the Council persists with a desire to name the proposed square London Inn Square when London Inn is no more and the location is not the same. It would be good to have a name which reflected the St Sidwells area, or a brand new name.

Principle H: We welcome the undergrounding of service vehicles to the development as for Princesshay and The Guildhall developments. We would ask that parking for disable people is accessible and sufficient to serve both this development and others in the city centre. Whilst we understand the benefits of closing Cheeke Street and that part of Bampfylde Street remaining to motor vehicles, it will inevitably put pressure on neighbouring roads. With the decision to close Paris Street to south bound traffic, Summerland Street inevitably sees more and faster flowing traffic as it has now become a major route around the city centre.

There is sometimes congestion with traffic queuing for the new Princesshay car park, backing up to Paris Street even though it has the benefit of Dix's Field to queue along. It is difficult to see how queuing traffic could be accommodated on existing streets which are narrow compared to others elsewhere. Whilst pedestrian access around the city centre will be improved by these proposals, roads around the development will become busier and it will be more difficult for pedestrians to cross roads. The County Council should undertake further studies to ensure the public can cross roads conveniently and safely. We are also unclear how the closure of some roads will affect bus services, whether city services, the rural bus network, Park & Ride buses, and long distance coaches (see our comments for Principle I).

Principle I: We support the development of a new high quality bus station. We suggest that the bus station should be able to link to the domestic bus service in the city to have an integrated bus service, with level access between bus stops and the bus station. We have concerns about the intensity of buses in the area if local roads are closed, and as mentioned for Principle H above, the impact of long distance and Park & Ride buses having fewer roads to navigate. We would encourage the County Council to investigate reducing the number of long distance buses entering the city

centre, possibly by an interchange near the M5 motorway. This could link to a new dedicated shuttle service, and possibly a train station on the Exmouth line, although we recognise that such a service would need to operate at times to reflect the timetable for long distance routes. It would also be helpful if proposals for an alternative bus depot and servicing garage site were made known in the near future as this will inevitably cause some additional congestion as a result of additional bus and staff movements.

Principle J. We strongly support this principle, and although the penultimate sentence appears interesting, we feel it needs clarification.

We would also like to make some additional points to support the development of the area:

1. We recognise that the architectural quality of buildings in Sidwell Street is poor, but they are of an era that re-shaped Exeter, as are the buildings in High Street. We recognise it may be difficult for some existing businesses to remain in this area if shops in Sidwell Street and Paris Street are redeveloped or replaced. However, they are an essential part of Exeter's retail economy and provision must be made for their retention. We would suggest that if it is felt necessary to re-develop Sidwell Street that a 'planning gain' could be to offer reduced rents to existing businesses or local business people.
2. There is much speculation about the provision of a new swimming pool on the site, and we recognise that the Pyramids swimming pool needs replacement. We would ask that the City Council should publish their investigations / options for a new swimming pool in the city, to demonstrate that the bus station siting is the best option. Some organisations have expressed a desire to have a 50m pool, as other major cities, and this should be taken into account in any investigation. We recognise that the City Council has recently suggested that the New Homes Bonus could support the provision of a new improved swimming pool, and together with a capital receipt from the disposal of the Pyramids site, and local council tax, we would hope that a new improved swimming pool can be provided in the City here. Indeed, it could provide one of the landmark buildings in the development.
3. We believe it is desirable to retain an open air market in Sidwell Street or in the new development. This could be made a central and permanent feature of the town centre and perhaps include the Farmer's Market. Markets elsewhere in the country, such as in Norwich, are a central feature of the city centre, and a draw to shoppers. The space that this would occupy could result in an open area that would also be a public space.

Yours sincerely

*Keith Lewis, Barbara Looser, Peter Wadham, Chris Watson, Pamela Wootton*  
Exeter Civic Society Planning Sub-Committee