



Exeter Harbour Front

A new outlook for Exeter Canal Basin

Introduction

Exeter Canal Basin is the city's vibrant harbour front.

Designation as a Heritage Harbour has heralded the need for a fresh approach to our waterways.

The Canal Basin Masterplan approved by Exeter City Council in 2004 is now outdated but is still in force as a council planning document.

A new plan and a fresh vision are needed to bring back the interest and vibrancy of maritime activity and give the Canal Basin economic and visitor focus as a busy harbourside for the city.

The Friends of Exeter Ship Canal

The Friends are a voluntary group dedicated to breathing new life into the use and heritage of the canal and basin as an integral part of the city's life and economy, for the enjoyment and benefit of everyone today and in the future.

This plan for the future of the Basin is a contribution by the Friends to the long-term strategy for sustaining Exeter's waterways as set out in the Friends' report *Making the Canal Matter Again to Exeter*.

Summary

The transformation of the Canal Basin will bring more maritime activity, commerce and visitors keen to catch the atmosphere. It is the terminus of a clear clean waterway to the city centre, a short walk from one of the most vibrant centres in the country for shops and heritage and close to offices and services – the terminus of an environmentally sustainable route for passengers and renewed commercial operations, as well as for holidaymakers and visitors afloat and ashore.

A step by step feasibility plan to optimise management, governance and income and develop funding and inward investment are the next steps towards successful delivery along with reconnecting commerce and communities with all the waterway can offer.

A working harbour front, not a static attraction

What has changed?

Exeter Ship Canal was once central to Exeter's life and business. As the city changed, the focus moved away from the canal and basin so for years the waterway's potential received very little attention.

Today it is widely appreciated that active waterway regeneration represents good value for the investments put into it. It can expand an area's overall economy, increase vitality of communities, help to meet crucial environmental challenges and draw more visitors through the diversity of its activities.

The vision for Exeter Harbour incorporates this fresh approach.

A strategy for all

The transformation of the Basin must also be an important and high profile part of the long-term strategy for governance and management that will create Exeter Harbour as an economic and social driver for the city:

- **Economic focus** through outward-looking commercial plans for boat building, maintenance and lay-up, berthing of historic vessels, freight and passenger traffic, waterway-related businesses, and boat hire.
- **Working jointly** with users and stakeholders to shape specific plans.
- **Optimising efficiency** of income and expenditure and identifying and exploiting external funding and investment opportunities for the waterway and basin.
- **Reconnecting people**, communities and visitors with the opportunities and benefits of today's waterway and its heritage.

The Basin's future is as a working harbour front with boats coming and going. It would be wrong if, through absence of an overall strategy, the Basin were to be subordinated into a leisure destination only or lost to the pressures of non-waterway or commercial property development.



Present into future – bringing Exeter Harbour to life

A Heritage Harbour

At the initiative of the Friends of Exeter Ship Canal, the Canal and Basin were designated in 2020 as a Heritage Harbour making Exeter only the fourth recognised Heritage Harbour in the country.

The Heritage Harbour scheme supports present-day maritime activity as a way to achieve the long-term benefits that maritime heritage can bring to an area – the future securing the past.

The buzz and vitality of maritime interest

Harbour activities will bring the buzz and vitality of maritime interest to the water and its frontage at the Basin and as well as adaptability for the Harbour to grow in a variety of directions:

- **Landing and embarkation points** for new public and leisure transport with watertaxi and scheduled waterbus services to stops to Marsh Barton railway station, Double Locks, Turf and beyond, and boat excursions and hire.
- **Dockside landing** of cargoes including fresh fish and shellfish and other produce and equipment for all-year-round markets, fairs and events on Piazza Terracina.
- **A welcome** and moorings for historic and visiting vessels.
- **Prosperous working boatyard** for restorations, repairs and new builds, lay-up and storage for variable tonnages, flexible craning arrangements, workshops to rent, slipway and landing stages for commercial and visiting boats of a range of sizes.
- **Openings** for established and start-up water-related business in the waterside buildings.
- **New skills and jobs** such as boat building and design, carpentry and boat maintenance — a centre of excellence that attracts work through a reputation for quality.
- **Shared community managed spaces** that are adaptable for studios, meetings, research, social engagement, education, training, exhibitions and pop-ups.
- **People's fitness, wellbeing and leisure** through water sports and activities for all backgrounds and abilities, and free access to waterside paths for sightseeing and safe walking and cycling.
- **Engagement and volunteer involvement** including training in canal operations and maintenance, and preserving and interpreting heritage and cultural memories.

- **Harbour and Canal Welcome Centre** for all users and visiting boaters, facilities for short and longer stays, information leaflets, timetables, self-guided trails and materials for children; supported by a dedicated website providing day to day information about the waterway and online bookings.

The new Harbour Plan for the Canal Basin

The Exeter Harbour plan for the Basin maps as closely as possible onto the City Council's 2004 Canal Basin 'masterplan', returning all the time to the new vision of an active harbour bringing benefits to people, business and the environment.

Premises around the basin that are currently occupied for non-waterway uses inevitably restrict future planning for harbour activity. When any buildings or land around the Basin fall vacant they should be re-assessed to encourage waterway-related businesses or to connect the community with the waterway.

Site 1: The Basin frontage



One of Exeter's special, defining spaces. The destination on the edge of the city centre of the city's waterway to and from the sea.

Currently

- Hardly any active waterway function and its historical importance virtually forgotten.

Transformation

- Exeter's lively, active harbour front
- Landing stage and embarkation points for scheduled and seasonal waterbus and watertaxi services
- Landings of produce and equipment for markets, fairs, and events on the Piazza and servicing the popular cafés and boutiques on the Piazza and around the wider area
- Departure and landing points for boat hire, excursions and ferries
- Visiting vessels of interest
- Turn around for boats on the Basin to be kept clear
- Cultural and community events ashore and afloat, such as a canal carnival
- No further reduction of the Piazza's open space

- Upgraded heritage interpretation, including a visitor trail and attractive presentation of the broad gauge railway turntable (c.1867) as a tangible reminder of the Canal and Basin’s heritage.

The new Marsh Barton railway station for commuters as well as leisure use is to open at Clapperbrook Lane, a short walk from the canal. Exeter City Council has set 2030 for becoming a carbon-neutral city. The canal and basin are already in existence as a sustainable clear green route to the city centre for passengers and freight, offering new modes of transport and connectivity. This historic asset is already a step into the future.

Site 2: Maclaines Warehouses and the adjoining green space



The dominant buildings on the Canal Basin. They owe their existence to the waterway and are critical functionally and visually for the Basin today.

Currently

- No waterway uses are planned
- Units 3 and 4 to be turned into office accommodation
- Historic Grade 2 listed buildings, all currently let together with the adjoining green space for non-waterway purposes.

Transformation

- Site for mixed-use waterfront hub for Exeter Harbour
- Uses to be aligned with revival of the waterway and boatyard
- Offices and co-working spaces and workshops for specialist boat and water-related businesses and associations
- Mixture of commercial landings for waterborne freight and visitor mooring along the frontages
- Adaptable work and storage spaces inside for freight transit, work on historic and other vessels, vocational skills training, and short courses for people of all abilities
- Interchangeable spaces for waterway-themed community, cultural and educational projects
- Flexibility for heritage displays ashore and afloat, art and craft studios, exhibitions, seasonal shops and produce markets

- Open-air pop-ups and entertainment on the green space.

Maclaines Warehouses represent an opportunity for community and volunteer involvement in co-managing them for flexible waterway-related uses as well as contributing to the prosperity and visitor experience of Exeter Harbour.

“Waterborne freight and better dredging could be future solutions to combating the climate emergency” — *Inland Waterways Association*,

Site 3: 60 Haven Road



Two adjoining warehouses, Grade2 listed buildings, that are integral to the Basin scene.

Currently

- Refurbished and let for non-waterway uses.

Transformation

- Return to waterway related uses as leases terminate to add to the Harbour Front’s maritime diversity and attraction
- Possible locations for chandlery and supplies for boaters, holidaymakers, harbour users and tourists
- Passenger landings utilising the broadwalk pontoon.

These important waterside buildings are examples of how important it is to assess the use of premises around the Basin to encourage waterway-related business and activity.

Site 4: 61 Exe Water Sports Association and adjacent premises



A run of buildings of varied character and quality that is an important and large area of the Basin's waterside capacity.

Currently

- Identified by Exeter City Living as a site for 46 homes-to-rent with replacement premises for Exe Water Sports Association on the ground floor.

Transformation

- An area for a new hub for community-based water sports organisations complementing Haven Banks Outdoor Education Centre opposite
- Club premises and other facilities including pontoons for existing associations and others, some shared
- Bases for small-scale water sports businesses
- Emphasis on promoting fitness, wellbeing and skill connected with the waterway
- All new buildings of a height to avoid a blocking, 'tunnel' effect in the Basin and retaining variations in height as well as spaces between giving views to and from the water
- New buildings to be sensitive to the occupants of residential properties behind
- Current hardstanding retained for boat storage and launching.

The site is a key example of the vision necessary to achieve the best prospective return for the City Council's waterside assets. As part of the long-term strategy for reviving waterway commerce, tourism and leisure, it has a future that is collectively more valuable and long-lasting financially and socially than the yield from the current plans for redevelopment, which will be expensive to implement. In addition, water-based sports and leisure improve people's fitness, skills and mental and physical health. They address social deprivation and inequalities by being accessible to everyone.

Site 5: Basin slipway



The slipway at the Basin is useless for launching and recovering all but the smallest craft.

Currently

- The slipway does not extend below the waterline but drops suddenly and steeply into deep water making it unusable for launching and recovering boats
- There are no functioning slipways on the canal
- Access for boats is limited to Turf Lock or lifting in by crane, which is a barrier to increasing activity and encouraging visitors
- Extending the Basin slipway into the Basin will interfere with water flows and boat activity.

Transformation

- Extend the slipway towards Haven Road
- Installation of a patent slipway to lift out vessels, including multihulls
- Slipway bookings for quick inspections and anti-fouling
- Electricity and water available for power washing
- Operation of the slipway as a component of the boatyard's services alongside facilities for shipwright, carpentry and boat repair work
- Possibility that proposed residential and commercial development at Water Lane should make Section 106 financial contributions to improving the slipway.

A modern harbour and a boatyard without a slipway is almost a nonsense. A functioning slipway will contribute to the services on offer and their prosperity and growth, as well as to leisure use of the waterway.

Site 6: Boatyard and boat storage areas on the east and west sides of the Basin as far as the Basin entrance



A scheme to promote the present boatyard and make it more attractive for vessels of different kinds is key.

Currently

- The boatyard has suffered historically from a mixture of poor facilities and marketing, unattractive fee structures and an increasing number of restrictions
- A game-changer for the boatyard and the canal as a whole will be the proposed raising of the headroom below the moveable bridges over the canal on the A379 that will make it easier for boats to reach the yard. Canal management should start preparing for the benefits of this now.

Transformation

- Create a traditional boatyard for the 21st century as an essential part of Exeter Harbour
- Moorings and storage for historic wooden vessels and other craft for longer-term restorations and conversions
- Enhance the attractiveness for visitors to the boatyard with a vibrant, changing backdrop on the water and quays
- Moorings and facilities for a wide range of pleasure and commercial boats for short repairs
- Maintain public quays free from obstructions to allow access from water to land and *vice versa*
- Seasonal lay-up attracted through competitive marketing
- Employment opportunities to train for skilled work such as shipwrights, riggers, carpenters and other craft jobs
- Convenient workshops to rent
- Community and volunteers' engagement with specific boat-related projects
- Moveable crane pads for a flexible response to weight restrictions
- Space close to the quays for larger vessels

- Heritage conservation and signage of waterside structures such as the hand crane on the east quay to increase knowledge of the basin's commercial maritime history.

Boatyard activities on and beside the water are endlessly fascinating for visitors and income generating lifeblood for Exeter Harbour. People are re-connected with Exeter's maritime history through the living heritage of boatyard work.

Site 7: From the entrance to the old gasworks to Exeter City Council's Canal Office



The use of this area is unconnected, wasteful, inefficient and unattractive despite its connection and proximity to the Canal and Basin.

Currently

- The area around the entrance to the Basin includes disused buildings on the perimeter of the old gas works site, the present inadequate Canal Office and its adjacent fenced yard.

Transformation

- Create a Harbour and Canal Welcome Centre as a vibrant hub for canal management and user and visitor information by bringing back to life the former gasworks manager's house, a fine locally listed building, and utilising its proximity to the Basin
- Provide services to visitors such as timetables, self-guided trails and materials for children and bookings for canal facilities and moorings
- Demolish the present canal office and combine with adjacent space for a showcase area for onshore historic boat restoration
- Incorporate in the adjacent gasworks buildings washrooms and toilets for visitor and long-term moorings and those working on boats
- Public toilets, if required

- Lockable yard for use by Harbour management
- Additional space for seasonal lay-ups, and rowing boat, canoe, kayak and paddleboard storage
- Create an attractive route with signage and heritage information from the harbour front to the canal
- Retain the Sea Cadets' headquarters and activity space.

The entrance to the Basin is the water gateway to Exeter Harbour. The transformation of this area also has the potential to create an attractive gateway to future housing and commercial development of the Water Lane area.

Site 8: Gabriel's Wharf



Exeter Harbour and its revived boatyard need space to accommodate developing maritime activity and water-related interests and business. The canalside area of Gabriel's Wharf, close to the basin, provides scope to supplement the basin and enhance the use of the Harbour and the canal.

Opportunities

Gabriel's Wharf, with its access to the sea via the canal and the estuary, is ideal for launching and berthing vessels of various sizes and designs, and has already been a location for high quality shipbuilding.

- A potential site for developing ship and boat building, skills training and marine-related activity and business
- A multi-capacity slipway for launching and recovery, hull inspections, repairs and building
- Launching for trail boats and short-term parking for boat trailers and cars
- Possible site for a base and boat storage for water sports.

In addition, the nearby site of the former SecAnim factory below Gabriel's Wharf was off limits for waterway-related activity not only because of ongoing industrial use but also because of the foul smells the factory generated. Parts of the waterside frontage

beside the canal towpath can now be re-evaluated for attractive waterway-related uses.

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The Friends of Exeter Ship Canal works for the Canal's future for everyone to enjoy. We want to see more boats on the water with more activity and interest in a thriving boatyard and an attractive, active harbour again.

We help preserve the Canal's heritage and protect waterside buildings. We organise outdoor work parties that keep the canal and paths clear and pleasant for water users, walkers, families and wildlife. We arrange events and talks so people can discover the waterway's interest, beauty and history.

We are corporate members of the Inland Waterways Association and work closely with the IWA West Country Branch.

We are an independent voluntary group. Please join us, either by becoming a volunteer or generally to support our work and aims.

