



Friends of Exeter Ship Canal

Exeter: A Heritage Harbour

15 December 2022

Ian Collinson
Director of City Development
Civic Centre
Paris Street
Exeter
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Dear Mr Collinson,

Response to The Exeter Plan Outline Draft, September 2022

We are grateful for the opportunity to respond to the Outline Draft of the Exeter Plan.

The Friends of Exeter Ship Canal is a voluntary group established in 2016, the year of the canal's 450th anniversary, to campaign for its future as an active waterway integral to the life and economy of the city and region. We secured Heritage Harbour status for the canal and basin in 2020, a prestigious national recognition conferred by the Maritime Heritage Trust and National Historic Ships UK.

Introduction: key points of our response

We believe that a water-based renewal for the city should be part of the 20-year Exeter Plan.

The Exeter Ship Canal and Basin and their environs, part of the Port of Exeter and the city's connected waterway to the sea, are integral to accomplishing every one of the seven key outcomes, the 'golden threads', of the Exeter Vision 2040 as well as the aims of Liveable Exeter.

In our view Exeter can add a valuable – and highly enviable – ambition as a waterway city to its vision for 2040. This should be signposted from the start as a specific element of the Plan.

We believe our response redresses an omission in the Draft Plan by referencing the significance of the waterways in enriching Exeter's achievement of new ways of adapting to modern life—through transformative innovation; people's health, activity, and physical and mental well-being; accessibility to high quality education and skills opportunities; liveable and valued neighbourhoods; sustainable net zero targets; new transport and active connectivity; and enjoyment and pride in culture, place and heritage.

The multiple contributions of the waterway can only be realised if the infrastructure and future of the canal and basin network are well planned and looked after. The City Council, as owner of the Ship Canal, is able to promote through the Plan an integrated and complementary approach to the water and the adjoining land that balances the objectives and requirements of the active waterway with those of residential and commercial development.

Our publications, *Exeter Harbour: A New Outlook for the Canal Basin* and *Making the Canal Matter Again to Exeter* set out a programme of far-reaching, practical ideas and objectives to release the canal's potential. Both publications feed into and are part of our response to the draft Exeter Plan, as is our previous response to the Water Lane development proposals. All are included as Appendices.

The following pages highlight ways in which Exeter's waterway network can contribute to the Exeter Plan's principles and aims. The scope of the waterway covers the whole of the Port of Exeter, from the coast and river, along the 5.2 miles of the Ship Canal to the city basin, and the canalside buildings. For ease of reference we list specific points against the chapter headings of the Plan. We believe they add up to a convincing strategic case for including them in Exeter's Vision.

This is our city, this is our future

2.14 The special settings of Exeter's canalsides, and the particular architectural and maritime heritage that is expressed through the scale of warehouses and other structures, should be included in the brief of the Exeter Design Quality Partnership. Massing, proportion and the effect that overshadowing has on the water's ecology and ultimately navigability are important considerations. We suggest a new bold approach to the design and technological challenges to match harmonious waterside architecture that enriches the area's visual culture with low carbon impact and neighbourhood needs.

2.17 and 2.19 refer to working with partners. We suggest it includes the City Council's building a partnership with other waterway organisations and stakeholders, using the direction of the Heritage Harbour Route Map as the guiding reference point. (N.B. The route map will be completed shortly.)

It is important to recognise that Exeter's waterway policies are a key strategic topic that will influence planning by neighbouring authorities and enhance the region as a whole.

Spatial strategy

S1 (2) In bringing forward new forms of employment, the canal and its environs are ideal for developing opportunities for people from all backgrounds, based not only around the regrowth of traditional craft industries such as boat building and repair, sail making and maritime engineering, but also as a site for research and the very latest hi-tech boat design.

Greater use of the water for passenger trips and visiting boats will develop a need for waterway-related employment as well as bring wider economic and employment benefits to commerce and tourism.

For these reasons we suggest adding an extra line to the list in S1: 'Enable full advantage to be taken of maritime and waterway related employment and skills opportunities provided by the canal and basin for traditional craft and hi-tech work and research.'

S1 (10) Exeter's waterways are integral to a range of infrastructure that supports communities and development, for example, not only pathways, cycle ways and emergent transport such as passenger ferries and low-impact commercial freight, but also through the prospect of contributing to sustainable hydro sources of power and heating.

Liveable Exeter Principles

S2 Planned as a active, functioning and well-used waterway for the benefit of everyone, Exeter Ship Canal should be acknowledged as a major contributor to Liveable Exeter's principles. We suggest an additional line in Principle 1, Memorable Places: [Development will] '• Harmonise and connect with the maritime activities and opportunities for personal well-being provided by Exeter Ship Canal and the canalside areas.'

Climate change

The waterway has the potential to contribute to the achievement of net zero Exeter and address many of the impacts of climate change, from mitigating flooding and drought and sustainably generating hydropower, to enabling active travel and low-carbon transport and reducing freight on the roads.

As part of the Council's net zero policy, there is scope for the canal to be used once again for cargo—especially local produce and supplies destined for city and waterside outlets. We suggest that the return of low-impact commercial traffic, including passenger ferries, should be included in the Climate Change section of the Plan as one of the contributions to net-zero (CE1).

4.2 We believe Exeter should follow the national call by the Inland Waterways Association (IWA) for installation of charging points for electric powered boats and regular dredging and weed clearance to make propulsion as efficient as possible. The canal is already a base for research by Exeter University into renewable energy to assist alternative methods of propulsion and cut environmental damage. The Council should endorse collaboration with such research by planning to ensure the canal remains an asset with facilities able to provide for such purposes.

4.12 Exeter's waterways have resources to contribute to decentralised power generation for local networks and the Plan should cultivate research and development to ensure opportunities are not wasted, eg:

- generating electricity by hydropower
- generating heat or cooling for buildings via water source heat pumps
- transporting waste via canal to the Marsh Barton incinerator.

Moving goods by water generates less carbon emission than current road transport.

Through collaboration with operators, innovative combined bus and ferry tickets for hop-on, hop-off points along the canal would be a low-carbon impact attraction for locals and visitors. Marsh Barton rail station would provide an interchange for travel by waterbus and water taxi services to destinations along the waterway, including the canal basin which is more accessible for the city centre than either St Thomas or St David's stations.

Homes

The waterway network of the Basin and Ship Canal leading to the Exe Estuary is a major ingredient of Liveable Exeter's objectives for living in the city and its neighbourhoods, and one of the attractions of moving to Exeter. This makes it key to the Plan's threefold vision for homes.

It should therefore be referenced as among the pulls of Exeter as a place to live, work, and relax body and mind. The canal and basin should never be relegated to the inertia of becoming just a pretty backdrop to non-waterway commercial concerns. The fascination and vibrancy of boats and boating bustle will strengthen residents' and visitors' interest. It is necessary to plan that land and buildings around the canal are kept available in order to achieve this.

Boats are moving, carrying things. While it is true that the Plan's objective to provide for Exeter's housing needs could be assisted by introducing residential boats on the canal, we urge that this is considered sensitively. It will suit a particular lifestyle and a desire to live closer to nature. It will not make a significant contribution to housing stock and a ribbon of houseboats would limit other water uses as well as be visually inharmonious. We urge instead limited, selected areas along the canal are designated for competitively priced, regulated, permanent moorings with first class facilities and that care is taken that they are not in conflict with other objectives for the waterway's economy, transport, natural environment and tourism.

Economy and jobs

A functioning canal and basin have significant potential to contribute to the Plan's educational Vision and the Objective of ensuring that the economic benefits of jobs, skills and training are available to all.

Outdoor study and classes based around waterways have been shown to spark young people's interests in STEM subjects such as engineering and science as well as ecology and the environment because they are able to see these disciplines in action along the water. At the other end of the scale, Exeter's waterway provides scope for research into transformational technologies for the environment from clean, emission-free propulsion to clean water.

A community skills centre based on the basin and around the canal and with links with boat building academies would develop skills among people of all ages and backgrounds in traditional maritime related crafts such as sail and mast making, carpentry, boat maintenance and metalwork. Training would be through short courses or linked to qualifications that could lead to jobs in fields where there are skills shortages. An emerging workforce with maritime related knowledge and skills would support start-up water-related businesses such as boat building and restoration with the aim of establishing Exeter as a

centre of excellence and attracting more work through a reputation for quality. The canal and basin offer the potential for this to be reality. When any land or building around the basin and canal falls vacant it should be reassessed first and foremost to encourage waterway related business or to connect the community with the water.

6.3 points to Exeter's potential to take full advantage of opportunities for economic growth. Appropriate development of the waterways would lead to growth in a wide range of businesses including tourism, maritime, sustainable transport and sports and leisure provision.

Policy EJ3 highlights the potential for work hubs, collaborative workspaces and live-work units, all three of which could be linked to water related plans.

The future of our high streets

7.4 highlights that the city centre must be connected effectively so people can travel easily. That is why it is vital to create good access between the city centre and the basin and canal for residents and future development. The quayside and basin are also top visitor attractions—another reason for better connectivity. The main barrier is the steep hill between the quay and the city centre.

We believe this is an opportunity to act on the Plan's Vision of Exeter as an innovative city. Architects and engineers should be challenged to come up with a visually exciting, efficient and carbon-clean link that makes it easy for people of all abilities to get from one level to the other. Ruling nothing out and nothing in, a travelator bridge over the inner by-pass, a sustainably powered mini funicular railway, and Llandudno-type cable cars are options. The draft Plan shows that a possible site for the base of such a scheme at South Gate has been allocated for redevelopment. The time looks right for the Exeter Plan to take this idea forward.

Making a tourist attraction of the link between quay and city centre would bring added economic benefits.

Sustainable transport and communications

Section 8 on sustainable transport and communications mentions walking, cycling and public transport but inexplicably makes no reference at all to waterborne transport of goods or passengers, despite the existence of the Exeter Ship Canal as a clear green route to the city centre for passengers and freight, passing close to Marsh Barton railway station and offering new modes of carriage and connectivity.

In fact the historic waterway and the city basin terminus are already a step into the sustainable future.

The Plan's objective to maximise sustainable transport and support emergent forms of mobility will not be fulfilled if it ignores the development and potential of electric boats and other forms of clean waterborne propulsion.

8.6 The A379 is integral to maintaining the important strategic role that Exeter plays as a regional hub and gateway to the national transport network. The planned replacement of the A379's moveable bridges over the canal at Countess Wear will allow the major road safety gain of pedestrians and cyclists being able to pass under the dual carriageway in safety, while the higher air draught will enable more boats to navigate the canal without the bridges being raised and the road shut. Both measures will improve connectivity and the environment, particularly as routine stopping of traffic at the pedestrian crossings, with the associated damage to air quality, will be abolished. Together with better use of the canal, this will have an impact on the wider economy.

The increased headroom will unlock the canal's potential for waterborne transport allowing all but the tallest craft to travel unimpeded, compared to the currently very limited opportunities when the moveable bridges are opened. It will be a game changer for the prospects of water buses and taxis, pleasure cruises, visiting craft, local commercial cargoes and the economy of the boatyard. It will become feasible that commercial freight could once again be carried right into the heart of Exeter via the sea and the canal in conjunction with such zero-emission schemes as Sail Cargo.

The city should continue its co-operation with Devon County Council on this road improvement. Planning ahead for an innovative ‘statement’ crossing would add a buzz to the attraction of entering Exeter.

Also important to these aims will be making existing locks more easily negotiable by powering the lock gates or other means.

The benefits of water transport will also support the new local multi-modal transport hubs and interchanges that the Plan envisages. The inclusion of a water transport element in a hub at Salmonpool Bridge/Marsh Barton railway station will become increasingly important as new housing developments at Water Lane and Marsh Barton are built. Waterborne passenger connectivity will also become an attractive way to access parks and walks. An interchange at Countess Wear would offer active onwards travel, or ferry, into the city or out to the coast.

We believe that daytime stopping trains at Marsh Barton should be scheduled half hourly, rather than hourly as currently planned, to encourage use.

8.13 portrays the canal, along with obstacles such as roads and large junctions, as barriers to walking and cycling in Exeter that need to be overcome while making the most of the river and canal in terms of active travel. The towpaths are already busy with pedestrians and cyclists, so it is imperative to improve accessibility and safety for increasing numbers.

Towpaths were designed to be slow lanes and should maintain an uninterrupted, stress-free quiet route along the waterside for the well-being of people who wish or are only able to walk. For cyclists, electric bikes and e scooters, and to accommodate growing usage and speeds, we recommend a separate ‘express’ cycleway away from the path. The stretch of towpath leading to the new Marsh Barton Station past the new development needs especially sensitive handling to retain its character because it will become a pedestrian and cycle commuter route.

Any new or replacement bridges across the canal should be electrically operated swing bridges, designed for boater operation. Fixed bridges are no longer appropriate as they would require an air draught no less than that of the M5 bridge.

Natural environment

9.20 states the Council’s Green Infrastructure Strategy will be updated alongside progress on the Exeter Plan. The Plan should acknowledge that Exeter’s waterways can contribute to all the green infrastructure elements outlined in paragraph 9.18.

NE1 provides protection for landscape settings in the city but allows exceptions for strategically important infrastructure. We believe this allows for the infrastructure suggestions in this response such as water transport hubs and hydropower that could include environmental mitigation measures.

History and heritage

In 2020 Exeter Canal and Basin were designated as a Heritage Harbour. Exeter was only the fourth in Britain to receive the prestigious recognition in the scheme run by the Maritime Heritage Trust and National Historic Ships. The Heritage Harbour, a living and visible part of the city’s heritage and history from pre-Roman times with both national and international significance, is not referenced in the draft Exeter Plan although the Plan’s history and heritage objectives chime entirely with the objectives of the Heritage Harbour scheme. This is not for museum-like maritime exhibits but would bring about the long-term revival of the canal and basin as a working heritage harbour—protecting historic infrastructure and buildings; maintaining the full functionality of the canal; delivering opportunities for low carbon impact activities based around traditional skills such as boat restoration and new clean technologies; contributing significantly to health and wellbeing; connecting people and liveable neighbourhoods with the city’s maritime history and contemporary culture; and fostering business growth.

10.12 The call for a collective effort towards net zero, including from historic structures, highlights the possibility of creating hydropower from the river weirs which are heritage assets. (See the hydropower plant at Knottingley on the Aire & Calder Navigation as an example: <https://canalrivertrust.org.uk/enjoy->

the-waterways/canal-and-river-wildlife/nine-ways-canals-can-fight-climate-change/hydropower/wheres-a-weir-theres-a-way)

The ambition of Exeter to become a city of heritage innovation feeds into suggestions for innovative improvements to the access between the city centre and the historic quay and canal.

Culture and tourism

We hope it was an oversight that the canal, basin and the river quay were not included in the draft Plan's list of cultural and tourist facilities (11.9). The opportunities that the canal and basin provide to enhance successfully Exeter's tourist profile and cultural identity should be one of the main points of reference.

Exeter, A Waterway City and water related tourism could create a whole new income stream for the city. The canal is a West Country holiday base in waiting. Hire boat and canal glamping holidays on parts of the canal meet the growing market for greener holidays. Trail boats would be able to visit the canal if it had a functioning slipway. Improved arrangements at the A379 bridges and provision of moorings with first class facilities would attract historic vessels and visiting boats from the sea to cruise the canal and stay at the basin. The boatyard would thrive. Associated businesses would benefit and income would increase.

With the attractions of the canal and basin and quayside, Exeter could host national and international waterborne and water related conferences. Community activities would make the waterway part of the city's all-year-round cultural, social and commercial calendar—an annual canal festival, picnic boats for hire in summer, visiting historic vessels, restoration projects, boat trips for people with special needs, a horse-drawn passenger barge, staging shows on water, school projects, and encouraging 'slower exploration' that combines water and land trails. These details belong to a further stage of the Plan's development but should be referenced now.

New facilities and community enhancements will need to be included in the Plan to cater for residents and new housing as well as growth of visitor numbers afloat and on shore. We suggest a plan to replace the Canal Office with a canal management and visitor information centre, including toilets, showers and waste disposal, and incorporating:

- community boat building and restoration projects
- courses and demonstrations for people of all ages and abilities
- meeting rooms and workshops for clubs and organisations
- studio spaces
- markets
- seasonal pop up projects
- maritime heritage materials.

The Plan should include the objective of restoring Topsham Lock that links the canal to the Exe and gives access to Topsham Harbour. By working with partners and volunteers, the lock and adjoining lock cottage could become the focus of a mini-hub for 'green holiday' moorings, non-tidal berthing, canal management and a base for the Topsham Ferry service and a new ferry along the canal into the city centre. Ongoing maintenance of the waterside grounds by volunteers would be followed by a voluntarily run information centre and refreshment stop and organisation of educational and bird watching visits as a project for community inclusion.

11.6 Exeter's Heritage Harbour complements the aims of the Creative Arc, the cultural partnership collaborating with the community in areas such as heritage, economic regeneration, education, employability and research. The harbour's scope for education and training, creative led activities and businesses could contribute to the Arc's funding bids for investment.

The canal basin's regeneration as an active harbour merits the call for new place-making and interpretation with opportunities for linkage with Artwork Exeter's new public art strategy (11.8).

High quality places and design

We believe this response highlights many roles that the canal and basin have in the place-making visions of the Exeter Plan: 'Liveable and connected', 'Healthy and inclusive', 'Leading sustainable city' and 'City

of culture'. The waterway and surrounds provide a source of inspiration for planning and architecture as envisaged in the Plan's Design Principles (D1). The Plan should spell out the planning principle that the purposes of the canal and basin should not be crushed out, visually or functionally, by interests alien to the waterway. The principles should encourage building design that aspires higher than to pastiche in delivering the Vision, encouraging varied and proportionate massing, rooflines and views.

Health and well-being

In this very important aspect of fulfilling the Vision of the Exeter Plan, the contribution of the waterway to the enjoyment of health and well-being of body and mind is undervalued and unreferenced. Waterways are today widely acknowledged as helping to improve the health and well-being of people living within range of them or visiting them. If access to water before covid in 2020 was important, it is even more so now and in the future that is being planned for.

Water based activities, including canoeing, paddleboarding, towpath walking, jogging and even volunteering are now available on prescription in many places to address social, emotional or health needs. The Plan should recognise potentials to deliver savings to the NHS and social care budgets, as well as the value to personal levels of activity and fitness.

In response to policies in H1, we envisage the canal and environs supporting such social prescribing as well as opportunities for innovation and research into benefits of active access to water, perhaps at a dedicated clinic. The canal could also support a hub for community based, all-abilities water sports organisations promoting fitness and skills on the water.

Flat canalside paths make them ideal for people with mobility difficulties to enjoy the water's edge and should be maintained as part of the Plan so they are accessible and safe for such use.

Infrastructure and community facilities

The objective of planning for new infrastructure and facilities at the right time and in the right places flags up the need for several waterway related plans to get under way as soon as possible because they will unlock significant steps towards delivering the overall visions of the Exeter Plan as well as becoming net zero by 2030.

14.8 states that an infrastructure delivery plan (IDP) will be prepared. It is vital the following items of infrastructure are included:

Bridges

- Continued pressing for the replacement of the A379 moveable bridges over the canal.
- Improving the canal's Salmonpool Swing Bridge and the river's Trews Weir suspension bridge because neither is wide enough for an increase in pedestrian and cycle traffic.
- Widening the narrow bridge over the flood relief channel at Haven Banks to enable pedestrians and cyclists to cross safely in flood conditions.
- Replacing the missing Mallison bridge across the Higher Leat at Exeter Quay, because pedestrians and cyclists have to navigate a narrow alley to and from the canal basin.
- Any new or replacement bridges across the canal should be electrically operated swing bridges designed for boater operation and locks should be easier to operate.

Weirs

- Ensuring the integrity of Trews Weir. If it fails, the canal is likely to lose its water.
- Research into hydropower schemes.

Slipways

- Currently there are no functioning slipways on the canal except for the smallest of craft. A review of slipway requirements is necessary for the development of most waterborne activities to proceed.

Access and parking

- To support the wider use of the canal and its paths easy access for all to the water and waterside is essential, including for vehicles transporting craft, whether canoes on car roofs, or boats on trailers or large cranes for boat lifting.

Moorings

- As well as first class, carbon zero facilities for pump out, portable toilet emptying, rubbish disposal, electric charging points, fresh water, toilets and showers, it is essential that moorings should meet up-

to-date specifications for disability access with sufficient space at the canal edge for organising wheelchairs, mobility scooters and guide dogs.

Clean water

- Any danger of sewage or effluent overflow into the water from the Countess Wear sewage works or elsewhere is unacceptable. The IDP will need to include co-operation with designated authorities to ensure the sewage system is adequate for the number of new dwellings and other developments that are planned for the city.

14.10 Community facilities that connect people with the water, especially on or in the vicinity of the canal basin, should feature as part of the Plan.

Potential development sites

Water Lane

Every development proposal, in particular those close to the canal and basin such as Water Lane should be considered in the light of possible impact on the operation of the canal and basin and the port as a whole to ensure there is no detrimental effect to their operation or sustainability.

South Gate

The draft plan only suggests highway alterations to improve pedestrian and cycle access between the city centre and the quay, basin and canal. With the steep hill as a barrier, that could still leave many people deterred. We believe there is potential for an innovative, fully accessible solution (see ‘The future of our high streets’, above).

Conclusion

In conclusion, we hope this response demonstrates the essential role Exeter Ship Canal and Basin have to play in the Exeter of the future. They offer a living heritage which should be at the heart of planned, zero carbon growth and design, new directions for employment, and the overall quality of living, working and well-being in Exeter’s neighbourhoods. We hope the response justifies the addition of references throughout the Plan to the innovative opportunities the canal and basin provide, and the adoption by the city of an additional ambition to become Exeter, A Waterway City.

Sincerely

John Monks

President and Acting Chair
On behalf of the Friends of Exeter Ship Canal

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The following appendices are included with the hard copy:

Appendix 1: *Exeter Harbour: A New Outlook for the Canal Basin*

Appendix 2: *Making the Canal Matter Again to Exeter*

Appendix 3: Response by the Friends to the Water Lane development proposals

Copies to:

Local Plans Team: City Development, Exeter City Council

Cllr Ruth Williams, Portfolio Holder for Waterways, Exeter City Council

David Bartram, Director, Exeter City Council

Grahame Forshaw, Harbour Master